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MONTHLY RETROSPECT OF POLITICS.

WHEN the Walcheren expedition sailed from England, men of observation, judging from the past, anticipated the failure, which has since so distressingly occurred. Affected vigour, and real imbecility characterized the movements of administration. Instead of judicious arrangements to overcome difficulties, in imitation of the energy of our mighty Opponent, but without possessing his strength of judgment, and to hide the weakness of their counsels by the artifice of the ass clothed in the skin of the lion, they despised the obstructions which lay in their way, and rushed rashly forward, even contrary to the advice of the military and naval officers, with whom they

consulted. As might easily have been foreseen, they failed, and probably an expedition to any other point would have been equally unsuccessful, at least under such management; and even if the Opposition had succeeded in getting into their places, and had undertaken the expedition which some of them in their blane of ministry have since recommended in preference, to the north of Germany, or the peninsula of Spain and Portugal, the result most probably would not have been materially different. We know what has happened, but who can calculate the disasters likely to arise from directing the system of Continental warfare to another point? It has hitherto emi-

nently failed in all shapes, and the future would most likely only be a repetition of the past.

As men of discernment predicted the result of the expedition, so they are not disappointed by the termination of the parliamentary inquiry into this business. Ministers had majorities in their favour, but such is the constitution of the house of commons, and the mode of election, that the decision of those termed the representatives do not frequently sympathize with the voice of the people. We often see a willing parliament, and a discontented people, and a ministry may be imbecile towards foreign nations, and yet employ the powers they possess by exerting a destructive energy against the liberties of their country.

In our last retrospect we noticed the committal of John Gale Jones to Newgate by the house of commons on the complaint of Charles Yorke, and of the opinion entertained by the freeholders of Cambridgeshire, who on account of his conduct in shutting the gallery of the house of commons, and for accepting a sinecure refused again to return Mr. Yorke to parliament. This month we have to record some very important events which have arisen out of the ill judged complaint brought forward against Gale Jones and his consequent committal. Great events sometimes arise from apparently trivial causes, and an injudicious exertion of power has not unfrequently led to important consequences.

Those who could last session bear to hear of an open traffic for seats, and who could shelter Percival and Castlereagh for their share in such transactions without manifesting any displeasure against the encroachments of the crown, are now vehement in their censure on Sir Francis Burdett, because he in a letter to his constituents asserted the rights of the people and published the substance of a speech which he made in parliament in favour of the liberation of John Gale Jones, and against the right of the house of commons to imprison at their pleasure.—Lethbridge the member for Somersetshire, a man hitherto little known in politics, and only remarkable for a motion against double barrelled guns

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in fowling, complained of his letter as a breach of privilege, and for two days interrupted the debates on the Walcheren expedition. The complaint was at length suspended, but in the course of the ensuing week was again resumed, when the letter of Sir Francis was voted to be a scandalous and libellous paper, and after a long debate Sir Francis was ordered to be committed to the tower, by a majority of 190 against 152, who voted only for a reprimand. Sir Francis resisted the warrant as illegal, and four days after, his house was broken open by a civil and military force, when he was conveyed to the tower. The populace of London and Westminster resented this attack on their favourite; and in some conflicts between them and the military, several were wounded and some lives were lost. Sir Francis has since given the legal notice that he will commence actions against the speaker and the sergeant at arms, and the business is in train to be brought before a British jury unless the progress is arrested by some point of law, when a discussion most highly interesting will take place. In the mean time, much important consideration occurs. The privileges of the house of commons were originally assumed to guard them against the prerogative of the crown; but were certainly never intended to be turned against the people, who are the legitimate fountain of all power.

Several occurrences strongly show the discordancy between the people, and those called their representatives. The house of commons imprison Gale Jones, and the freeholders of Cambridgeshire eagerly embrace an opportunity of not returning the member, who complained of him, after he had represented that county for upwards of 20 years. The commons send Sir Francis Burdett to the tower, but the people loudly cheer him, and are only restrained by a vast military force.

On certain points both sides of the house approach pretty closely. The opposition last year showed no disposition to stop the trafficking in seats; this year Sir Francis is generally condemned. He belongs to neither party, and his manly conduct is too forcible for the nerves of

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oppositionists, who instead of being anxiously desirous of lessening the power of corruption, are seeking to have the direction of it in their own hands: hence he is not a favourite with either party, but the people hail him as their staunch undaunted advocate. If timid counsels had swayed in former days, we should have had no Magna Charta, no bill of rights, nor any of those advantages, which reformatory have produced. To such generous spirits we are indebted for highly important privileges.

" Such souls, tis true, but peep out once an age.

The tongue of malice attempts to asperse them, calumny arraigns their motives, and attempts to lower them to the standard of those

" Dim lights of life, that burn a length of years,
Useless, unseen, as lamps in sepulchres."

but the virtuous of the present day do justice to them, and their names will live in the recollection of a grateful posterity. Perhaps nothing more strikingly shows that "one good deed was never wrought in vain," than the recollection that the vigorous exertions made by Wilkes and the electors of Middlesex in former days, had a most salutary effect in the present crisis in preventing the expulsion of Sir Francis; an event which without doubt would have been attended with his re-election by the inhabitants of Westminster. The house wisely stopped short, and after hearing a strong letter addressed by him to the speaker, voted, that as Sir Francis Burdett was already in the tower, no further procedure was necessary.

In reviewing his conduct, he is certainly entitled to much praise for his cool determined conduct. He has been censured by his enemies, and the enemies of liberty, as also by some well intentioned, timid people, as having by his resistance been the cause of the bloodshed which ensued, but surely not he who resists, but they who compel to the necessity of resistance in a just cause, occasion all the mischief, which takes place. Sir Francis used no violence, he only resisted, that force might be applied, and the case more strongly laid for a legal investigation. In one

part of his letter it is not easy to understand him; he talks of the commons "lording it over the king and the people"—We see no tendency or leaning to the former, nor can we perceive the advantage of exalting the monarchical part of the constitution in the present day. Does Sir Francis really mean all he says on this subject? if he does it is difficult to understand him, and we are unwilling to suppose he means to deceive. He ought to be more explicit, and give no room to suspect that he uses false colours.

However we may object to this part of the Baronet's conduct in compliance with our plan of strict impartiality, he is certainly entitled to much merit for bringing the question to a legal decision. The virtuous Hampden resisted the payment of shipmoney when laid on by the sole authority of a king: Wilkes by his resistance to the warrant of a Secretary of State, procured a judicial determination against the validity of general warrants, and Sir Francis resists the authority of the house of commons to imprison at their pleasure, not in maintenance of their right to be free from obstructions in their proceedings, but for a supposed libel on one of their members in the first instance of John Gale Jones, and in the other for a libel on the house. If we look back to the page of history, it will be found that by the exertions of public spirited individuals, our liberties have from time to time been snatched from the grasp of power, and a foundation gradually laid for the security of the rights of the people. Power and privilege are essentially different. It is fitting that the house of commons should possess the privilege of defence in the furtherance only of the public service, but not the power of annoyance against the people in support of an imaginary or assumed dignity. Let us suppose a corporation, over which the people retain little influence either by popular election, or by a reciprocity of feeling but of which a large proportion is returned by ministerial influence, assuming a power to imprison at their pleasure, and the danger to liberty arising from such assumption must be apparent. So circumstanced, who can say whose

turn will come next to suffer under the exercise of this claim?

It is one of the unfavourable symptoms of the decay of public spirit, and of the state of apathy so prevalent at present, niggardly to deny praise to courageous spirits, who step forward in the public cause. Many are so firmly grounded in the creed of selfishness, which they have learned from a consciousness of their own motives, that they consider virtue only a name, and a notion altogether unreal. Hence in part arises that systematic plan of detraction, and calumny, which pursues all who think independently for themselves. But "wisdom is justified of her children," and it is inherent in the nature of virtue to outlive the puny efforts of malignity, and establish a character that will survive the illiberal party spirit of the day:

Their sons will blush, their fathers were his foes."

In the present case it is pleasing to find that Sir Francis Burdett possesses a most amiable private character. He was taken in the midst of his family circle, that sanctuary of domestic virtues, supported by the affection and firmness of a beloved wife, and in the very act of teaching his son to translate *MAGNA CHARTA*.

The motion of Sir Samuel Romilly to liberate John Gale Jones has been negatived, because he would not consent to present a petition acknowledging his sorrow for offending the house. A petition of such a humiliating nature, Sir Samuel justly remarked was more likely to be the effect of hypocrisy, than of any real conversion. John Gale Jones prefers honourable imprisonment to any compromise of his principle. A liberal subscription is raising to indemnify him for his present sufferings.

The inhabitants of Westminster have met, and published strong resolutions in favour of Sir Francis Burdett, with an address of thanks to him, and a petition to the house of commons for the liberation of their representative, and in favour of a reform in the constitution of that house. All these will be found on record at the close of this article.

We wish to preserve them for future reference, and to complete the history of the present period. Every thing at this meeting was, as it ought to be, peaceable and firm, equally disappointing those, who expected outrage, or cowardly abandonment of principle. Ministers were alarmed, and had a large military force in the vicinity, but no pretext was afforded them for calling in its aid. If Opposition expected that the people would be timid and time-serving like themselves, their disappointment would prove equally great. After this meeting how must our Irish member George Ponsonby feel himself lowered: he who declared his persuasion that in case of expulsion, the electors of Westminster would not again return Sir Francis. The conduct of public men and candidates for place should be remembered—that the advantages of their return to power may be duly appreciated. It is worthy to be recollect, that this same leader of opposition, last session extended his forgiveness to Lord Castlereagh for his conduct respecting the trafficking in seats, on the plea, that the practice was too general to be made the object of any particular notice: thus assuming the prevalence of the evil as a pretext for its continuance. But he was conscious his side of the house wanted similar indulgence, and the people may see how little dependence they can have in such men either in or out of place. The times require more firm defenders of the rights of the people.

The house of commons submitted to receive the petition and remonstrance; but reluctance, arising from false notions of offended dignity, was evident. It is the privilege of superior minds only to recede with dignity. They must perceive that they hold opinions different from the majority out of doors. We most ardently wish that the democratic part of our government may be fully restored, by such a reform of the house of commons as that they may accurately prove the organ of the public will—**THE PUBLIC WILL THEIR GUIDE, THE PUBLIC GOOD THEIR AIM.** At present the state of the public finances will probably bring all ranks to a feeling sense of our situation.

The system of taxation cannot be pushed much further. Huskisson says we cannot go on without reducing the expenditure to the state of the income, and Lord Cochrane at the meeting of the Westminster electors points out the danger in strong terms.

"In my conscience (said the noble lord) believe, that this country cannot rely for its security upon the navy, from the circumstances in which that branch of our defence is now from many causes placed. The fact was, that, ... this moment, there were not for the repairs of our present shipping six weeks materials in Plymouth dock; that near half the artificers had been discharged, and that we were absolutely without the means of building one half of a 74 gun ship."

What say the advocates of war to these assertions? Nations like individuals sometimes blindly rush on their ruin. A vigilant care of the public purse, and a rigid curtailment of every unnecessary expense including the complete cutting up of corruption by the roots, can alone preserve from external pressure and internal commotion, and this happy consummation can alone be obtained through a reformed system of representation, in which the unbiased voice of the nation shall have due weight.

The freeholders of Middlesex are to meet to consider of the imprisonment of Sir Francis Burdett, as are also the inhabitants of the borough of Carmarthen and the livery of London. We trust there will be a general expression of the sense of the nation, as was exemplified last year in the addresses to Colonel Wardle. The friends of the people should not be left unsupported.

A decree was passed the beginning of last month in France. It relates to state prisoners, and the preamble says, "that there is a certain number of persons in the state prisons, whom it is not convenient, either to bring to trial, or to set at liberty—that though they would be condemned by the tribunals to capital punishments, superior considerations oppose their being brought to trial; that several are men accustomed to crimes, but who cannot be condemned by our courts, though they have the certainty of their culpability."

The editor of an English paper (the Morning Chronicle) remarks, "such is the horrible nature of Bonaparte's tyranny and the debased state of the people to whom he dares so fearlessly to avow it."—On looking back for a few years, can we discover no other country, to whom the editor's pity might have been extended? We have heard of state prisoners long detained, and after the lapse of years discharged, without being brought to trial. Censure ought to be even-handed.

Before we arraign Bonaparte, let us examine if our rulers are sufficiently clean-handed to appear as accusers. We dislike despotism in every shape, and so far as Bonaparte is a despot, he has our cordial disapprobation. But let us not mistake cowardly abuse for virtuous indignation. Let us even have the generosity to praise an enemy. He has produced an amelioration in the countries which he has over-run. It is said that by judicious measures, at Naples, the Lazzaroni, that indolent and mendicant race have been restored to habits of industry, and consequently to a higher scale in the rank of accountable moral agents.

A disagreement has taken place between the governor and the house of assembly of Jamaica, occasioned by a bill passed by the house of assembly to prevent the Methodists from instructing the negroes, being refused his assent by the governor. We have thus at once an instance of the inveterate prejudices of the West Indians against our sable brethren, and of the cruel intolerance of bigotry, alike blind to the dictates of justice and sound policy. A well educated slave is less dangerous than one brought up in ignorance, and we have no doubt but that the instructions of the Methodists, would ameliorate the negro, and render him, even though still kept in a state of slavery, a more useful and less dangerous member of society. Ignorance always makes men dangerous, and fits them for outrages.

Henry Parnell has failed in persuading the house of commons to appoint a committee to investigate the nature of the system of tithes in Ireland. Considering the circumstan-

ces of our country, where perhaps nine parts out of ten, of our population are dissenters from the national establishment, tithes are a most oppressive grievance, and a very great obstruction to agriculture. They are alike disagreeable to those who pay, and to the humane clergyman, who by this system is liable to be engaged in perpetual altercation with his neighbours. But such is the dread of innovation, that rather than make some alterations to give strength and stability, every thing is put to the hazard, that things may be retained in the old state without repair, until some mighty revolution overwhelms all in one general ruin.

At a meeting of the freeholders of the county of Tyrone, held at Omagh, resolutions have been passed in favour of the Catholics, provided they concede the veto on the nomination of bishops. We should hail this event as an omen of increasing liberality so far as it goes, if we could divest ourselves of the suspicion, that election politics had too much influence in this seemingly liberal attempt to do justice to our countrymen, whose creed differs from the church by law established.

We quote from the Morning Chronicle, the following paragraph and resolution. They entirely accord with our sentiments, as we have frequently expressed them in the retrospect.

"CATHOLICS.—Some resolutions were adopted by the Catholics of the county of Tipperary, at a meeting held on the 31st of March, which express a strong desire to obviate the difficulties that have arisen in the discussion of the Catholic claims—After advertizing to the apprehensions entertained (which they consider as the only remaining obstacle to Catholic freedom) let the future appointments of Catholic prelates may be liable to a foreign influence, the second resolution states—

"That although we consider such apprehensions as wholly groundless, and contrary to long experience of the acknowledged virtues and unimpeached good conduct of our prelates, yet, being earnestly desirous to conciliate all our Protestant countrymen, we feel every wish and hope, that those apprehensions may be obviated; and for that purpose, that

some temperate measures may, in the event of Catholic Emancipation, be upon mature deliberation devised, which shall render such future elections substantially domestic; either by the votes of the surviving prelates, or by the choice of the clergy of the diocese, in chapter assembled, or by such other proceeding as shall be found compatible with Catholic doctrine."

The state of the public mind is improving, and has most materially improved within the last 18 months. For this change we are in a considerable degree indebted to the investigation of last year on the conduct of the Duke of York. Then many of the secrets of corruption were laid open. The imprisonment of John Gale Jones, and of Sir Francis Burdett in the present session, is producing equally salutary effects to which may also be added, the termination of the inquiry into the expedition to Walcheren. This combination of circumstances loudly proclaims the necessity of reform. As an index of the change of public opinion we contrast the difference in the language of the editors of news-papers, many of whom are more solicitous to please than to instruct. They are coming round, and express sentiments more inclining to the popular side. The weather-cocks are veering round, as the wind is blowing in a different direction.

It is pleasing to find that a sentiment is gaining ground in favour of mitigating the punishment of death in certain cases, and that a plan is in agitation among the proprietors of bleach greens in this country to petition the legislature to change the punishment of death for robbing bleach-greens, to transportation or imprisonment, coupled with a system of hard labour. Additional security would thus be given to bleach greens, by substituting a more mild, but more effectual punishment. Now many escape from an opinion very generally, and very justly prevalent, that the punishment is disproportioned to the offence. Perhaps nothing shows the force of this opinion more strongly than that witnesses and jurors will prefer to go to the very brink of perjury rather than to convict when death is the penalty. If the law

were changed, convictions would more readily follow, and the prevention of crimes would be effectuated by substituting certainty to severity, in the mode of punishment. The law is too severe for the present temper of the times, the progress of knowledge has meliorated the minds of men, and induced them to apportion more accurately the punishment to the crime. The law should keep pace with this improvement, and Sir Samuel Romilly deserves great praise for his exertions to lessen the number of capital punishments. Our system of jurisprudence is so sanguinary as to defeat the avowed purpose of severity. It is only sanguinary in the letter, and is extremely lax in the execution. Of two evils humanity prefers to let the guilty escape, although offences are thus multiplied, and offenders by their frequent escapes are rendered more incorrigible, rather than punish with a severity altogether disproportioned to the offence. The twelve tables of the Roman law, were like the statutes of Draco, written in the characters of blood. Among other cruel enactments, insolvent debtors were punished with the greatest severity, but the attempt was ineffectual to prevent running in debt. The judicious remarks of Gibbon, on the useless severities inflicted by this law, are applicable to the present times.

"The advocates for this savage law, have insisted, that it must strongly operate in deterring idleness and fraud, from contracting debts which they were unable to discharge; but experience would dissipate this salutary terror by proving that no creditor could be found to exact this unprofitable penalty of life or limb. As the manners of Rome were insensibly polished the criminal code of the decemvirs was abolished, by the humanity of accusers, witnesses and judges; and impunity became the consequence of immoderate rigour."

At page 316, among the public occurrences, will be found a correspondence with Sir Samuel Romilly, on the subject of capital punishments.

OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS.

WESTMINSTER MEETING.

The following resolutions, with an address to Sir Francis Burdett, and a petition and remonstrance to the House of

Commons were agreed on at a meeting held the 17th inst.

Arthur Morris, esq. high bailiff in the chair.

Resolved, That we most highly approve of Sir Francis Burdett's letter to us his constituents, the subject being of the utmost importance, and the argument incontrovertible.

That Sir Francis Burdett's conduct in calling upon the civil power for the protection of his house against a military force, was dictated by prudence, knowledge of, and confidence in the laws of his country.

That the house of commons be called upon to restore to us our beloved representative, and to co-operate immediately with him in his endeavours to procure a fair representation of the people in parliament.

That the petition now read, be adopted, that it be signed by the high bailiff and twenty-five electors, and delivered to our remaining representative the right honourable lord Cochrane, to be by him presented to the house of commons.

That a letter be addressed to Sir Francis Burdett, expressing our full and entire approbation of the whole and every part of his conduct as a member of parliament.

That the letter now read, be adopted; that it be signed by electors in the name of this meeting, and that the high bailiff be requested to present the same to Sir Francis Burdett.

That the thanks of this meeting be given to our worthy representative the right honourable lord Cochrane, for his support of Sir Francis Burdett, during the present arduous struggle.

That the thanks of this meeting be given to those independent members of the house of commons, who have supported the rights of the people.

That the thanks of this meeting be given to Arthur Morris, esq. high bailiff for his ready compliance with the requisition of the electors, and for his able and impartial conduct in the chair.

To the honourable the Commons of the United kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, in parliament assembled.

The petition and remonstrance of the inhabitant householders, electors of the city and liberties of Westminster, assembled in New Palace yard, the 17th day of April, 1810, by the appointment of Arthur Morris, esq. high bailiff, in pursuance of a requisition for that purpose.

We, the inhabitants householders, electors of the city and liberties of Westminster, feel most sensibly the indignity offered to this city, in the person of our beloved representative whose letter to us has fallen under the censure of your ho-